CAPTAIN GEORGE'S

Penny Dreadful

TORONTO, AUG. 26, 1977 NUMBER 444

A WEEKLY REVIEW

DON MILLER

STILL FURTHER BACK TALK: John Matthew's tribute to Larry Parks in P. D. #430 recalls an era in history all of us would rather forget, because nobody who was part of it comes off very well, on either side. By that I mean the Communist witch-hunt thing. For Parks it was a near-total disaster; he was assigned the meanest role of his career, the fall guy. And he had to play it, and it wasn't a movie, it was real life.

Parks was one of the original contingent of Hollywood notables called before the Un-American Activities Committee in October, 1947. He wasn't a witness then--his predecessors refused to testify about their political associations and became known as the "Unfriendly Ten." Parks finally returned to Washington in 1951, so for four years he had this sword hanging over his head, which can be rather hard on the nerves, especially if one's bread and butter depend on it.

Whether Parks's political connections ruined his film career or not is open to question, but surely they didn't do it any good. However, up to the initial summons, The Jolson Story had been his big hit, had in fact made him a star. Thereafter, the sequel, Jolson Sings Again, was a boxoffice success, although not up to expectations. Otherwise, his vehicles were undistinguished, and the thought persists as to his popularity decreasing anyway, bad headlines or no. Not that it matters. The bigwigs currently in the saddle got Parks on the griddle, skewered him, let him sizzle, and allowed him to crawl away after depriving him of an actor's sustaining force. His ego.

Not that Parks had a radical fling that was blameless, as Mr. Matthew suggests. It was neither "brief" nor particularly "innocent." He had joined the Communist Party in 1941, gradually drifted out in 1944 or 1945. Parks admitted this. But it wasn't enough for the Committee. They wanted Parks to name names, tell them who his fellow cell members were. "I don't think that this is really American justice, to force me to do this," Parks pleaded. He begged them not to force him to "crawl through the mud to be an informer." But the Committee insisted. Broken, Parks gave in. The scary part is this: the Committee already had all the names Parks listed. They just wanted him to recite them, publicly. It was an insidious torture. To the Left, he was a squealer, to the Right, a suspect ex-Commie. Parks made a film opposite Liz Taylor that flopped, later a nothing pic in England, still later a featured role in a John Huston biog about Freud. His film career to all intents and purposes had ended on the first day of spring in '51. He kept busy doing stock around the country, but it wasn't the same, not after tasting film stardom.

However one may feel about the whole nasty political business, there's no getting away from it. Larry Parks had a bum rap hung on him. The fun-filled Fifties? Sometimes they could be lousy.

CAPTAIN GEORGE'S PENNY DREADFUL, a weekly review established in 1968, is published by the Vast Whizzbang Organization at Memory Lane, 594 Markham Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

DON DAYNARD

I've been away on vacation so if you know all this, it's new to me. I hear plans are afoot (ahoof?) to film a brand-new theatrical version of The Lone Ranger. They tell me 2,596 radio shows were broadcast, two Republic serials made, 221 tv shows produced, 78 animated tv episodes created and 18 novels published as well as two feature films starring Clayton Moore and Jay Silverheels, but from where I sit right now, I don't think a new version of Lone and Tonto is going to do much.

I suppose it's all because of the anticipated boxoffice for Superman that Lone is being dragged out and dusted off, but let's fact it, the Western as we knew it is Dead. Blame it on Blazing Saddles or Viet Nam, whichever grabs you, but a new Lone Ranger will suffer the fate of Batman in this day and age. I hate to say it but I think it's true. Stagecoach revived westerns years ago when they were near death but I doubt the same thing will happen now.

And speaking of re-dos, whatever happened to that planned new version of Tarzan Of The Apes written by Robert "Chinatown" Towne and directed by, God Forbid!, Mike Nichols? Did that ever get off the drawing board?

Good news for Philip Marlowe fans. Robert Mitchum is reprising his characterization of Chandler's private eye in another version of The Big Sleep with a cast including Sarah Miles, Joan Collins (pant, pant), John Mills, Oliver Reed, Colin Blakeley and James Stewart. It's being shot in London, England, which doesn't seem right to me. Wonder what #1 Marlowe-Chandler buff Pete Harris thinks of that. Michael Winner is directing. At least it isn't Robert Altman, Pete!!

Oh, one other thing. Plans are afoot (abreast?) to film a theatrical version of Sheena, Queen Of The Jungle in South America. Too bad Irish McCalla, Clayton Moore, Jay Silverheels and Johnny Weissmuller can't get in on all this activity. And now that I mention it, is Kirk Alyn going to get a part in the new Superman? It would be a shame if he doesn't. (Editor's Note: According to the September issue of The Comic Reader, "Rumors are very strong that a very special twosome will be playing Lois Lane's parents in the film: Kirk Alyn and Noel Neill. That's nice... TIME mentions that the budget has now ballooned to $33 million. Sort of gets you right here, doesn't it.")

PULP NOTE: The Aug. 27 issue of The Canadian magazine, which is circulated weekly in 13 newspapers from Vancouver to Montreal, includes an article by Bernard Drew on the peculiar view of Canada found in American pulp magazines of the 1930s and 40s such as Doc Savage, Argosy, The Avenger and The Shadow. Suitably illustrated.

PETE HARRIS

THE DAIN BANE: Dashiell Hammett's 1929 novel The Dain Curse, which was set in and around San Francisco and featured his nameless private detective, the Continental Op, will become a six-hour CBS mini-series next year. Location filming is scheduled to begin in October in New York. James Coburn, who could be described as the antithesis of the Continental Op, will star in the series as "a world-weary private eye." And guess what the name of this world-weary private eye will be (overlooking for the moment that Hammett never, ever named his Op in all the short stories and novels he wrote about him). The name of this world-weary private eye to be played by James Coburn will be (are you ready?)...Hamilton Nash. Hamilton Nash!!??! Hamilton bloody Nash. All together now, one large, succulent raspberry to the producers of The Dain Curse.

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DISCUSSION KONGCLUDED: In P. D. 441, I mentioned the continuing question of whether there was a guy in an ape suit in any part of the '33 production of King Kong. Kenneth Anger writes in response: "All you need to do to end the 'Kongfusion' is to look at the original King Kong again. All the scenes featuring the full figure of Kong are done in 'stop-motion' (frame-by-frame animation) as is the case of all the prehistoric monsters, with the exception of the brontosaurus in the lake (it is impossible to 'animate' water). Stop-motion, even in the hands of a genius like O'Brien, necessarily results in a certain jerkiness, a 'look' that is unmistakable. All of the shots of the Kong figure have this look. They even have inadvertent animation of the fur covering the figure, where this was disturbed by the fingers of the animators making the minute changes in the figure's movements between the frame-by-frame photography. Except for the full-scale closeups of head, foot or hand, anyone with eyes in their head can tell that Kong is animated--and brilliantly. Let's put that 'man in a monkey suit' myth to sleep once and for all." Done.

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THE COMIC OBSERVER: I have been remiss in my duties until now in not mentioning the two-volume Nostalgia Press collection of Noel Sickles' classic 1930s aviation comic strip Scorchy Smith. The problems that publisher Woody Gelman and editor Bill Chadbourne had in assembling the strips are enough to make a collector shudder, problems that are evident in the borderline quality of some of the strip reproductions. But, it is, nonetheless a two-volume set that no true comics fan should be without. The price is $6.95 per volume in the U.S., $8.30 in Canada.

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CINEMATIC SUPERHERO: The 90-minute live-action TV movie based on Marvel's Spider-Man, with Nicholas Hammond as Peter Parker and you-know-who, is slated to run on Hamilton's ch. 11 Tuesday, Sept. 13, at 9:00 p.m. and CBS Wednesday, Sept. 14, at 8:00 p.m.